

Rom 3:21-31
Tim Anderson 13/11/22

Four weeks ago,
it seems like a long time ago,
we read Paul's summary statement of his life –
certainly his summary statement of the letter to the Romans.
Romans 1:16-17

“I am not ashamed of the gospel,
because it is the power of God that brings salvation
to everyone who believes:”

The gospel is what Paul is on about.

Gospel means good news.

The good news about how broken people like you and I
can gain access into the kingdom of God.

And then for three weeks after hearing that good news,
Paul bombarded us with bad news.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven ...”

Why did he tell us the bad news?

So we would have a realistic understanding of our position.

The first step towards a solution
is to know exactly what the problem is.

So he explained to us the full gravity of our problem.

Rom 3:10-12 “There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands,
there is no one who seeks God.

All have turned away.”

If there is no one righteous,
how do we stand before a righteous God?

In Paul's summary statement we read,

“In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.”

We who don't have our own righteousness
gain access to God's own righteousness.

That's an amazing transaction.

Righteousness means to have right standing.
It means to be in right relationship.
We don't have that under our own steam,
but God gives us access to his own goodness,
his own holiness,
and says,
"You can wear that.
And then you will be able to stand in my presence."

My first youth minister's name was Warwick Grant.
He was youth minister at Christ Church Ormond in the 1980s.
His son is now studying at Uni with Lwendyl and Emdwyn.
Every couple of years,
there is a clan gathering of the Grants.
They all meet together in a large venue,
and have fun tracing who is related to whom and all that.
But you could only go if you were a Grant.
I'm an Anderson.
I couldn't turn up.
Suppose Warwick wasn't able to make it.
He couldn't just say to me,
"You go instead of me.
I'll give you my ticket."
A ticket doesn't make me a Grant.

In the case of God allowing someone to stand in his presence,
being righteous is like having the surname Grant.
It's a quality that is either in you or it's not.
Warwick is a Grant.
I am not.
God is righteous.
Human beings are not.
But somehow God transfers his righteousness to us.
There's no way that Warwick could transfer his Grantness to me.
But God gives his righteousness to us.

It's an amazing transaction.
But how could it possibly happen?

The simple answer is in verse 22 of today's reading.
"This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ
to all who believe."

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ –
then you gain access to God's righteousness.
In order to be saved from God's wrath,
that's what you need to know.
That's all you need to know.
I don't have a righteousness of my own.
But God will give me his righteousness
if I put my trust in Jesus.

Christianity is not a religion
that requires you to be an intellectual giant to be able to be a member.
Which is good,
because otherwise it wouldn't be a level playing field.
If there was lots to understand,
God would be giving the bright ones an advantage
over the not so bright ones.
But all you need to understand is this:
I don't have a righteousness of my own.
But God will give me his righteousness
if I put my trust in Jesus.
It's simple enough for a three year old to understand.
I know that because I've met three year olds who understand it.

But not everyone is content with a simple explanation.
Many people will ask,
How does trusting in Jesus
enable me to gain access to God's righteousness?
You don't need to understand this to be a Christian.
That's important.

Sometimes folk
when they first understand
how Jesus death on the cross takes away their sins,
they get so excited by this knowledge,
that they think that you need to understand this stuff
in order to be a Christian.

It's not true.

You just need to put your faith in the Lord Jesus to take away your sins
to be a Christian.

You don't need to know how he does it.

The point of explaining how Jesus takes away our sin
is that some people won't believe something
unless they know how it works.

People with sharp enquiring minds will often dismiss something
unless they understand it.

So this is the way God turns your trust in Jesus
into free salvation.

Letting you share in his righteousness.

The key word is in verse 24.

God justifies you.

What does that mean?

There's a nice little way to remember justified.

I'm justified – just as if I'd never sinned.

It's easy to remember because it sounds similar.

Justified – just as if I'd.

That's easy to remember.

But a more accurate way to think about being justified is
justified is the opposite of condemned.

So what is the difference between being justified and being forgiven?
Forgiveness works like this.

Suppose you come to me and say to me,

“Tim, I've just been weeding your garden for you,

and I thought your blueberries were weeds and I pulled them out.”

I would say to you,

“Look I know you were trying to be helpful to me.

I forgive you.

I won't hold it against you.”

The essence of forgiveness is that there has been a wrong done.

And the wrong is not being held against the wrongdoer.

They're let off the hook.

Justification works like this.

Suppose someone comes to me and says,

“Tim, someone's been weeding your garden for you,
and I think they are pulling out plants that you want to grow.”

Now I know that you have been weeding the garden,
so I go to the garden to examine the claim.

And when I get there,

I find out that it's not true.

You've been weeding the garden but you've only pulled out weeds.

So I make this declaration.

You are innocent of the charge levelled against you.

I have examined the facts

and I find that you are not guilty.

You have been justified.

It has been declared that you have done nothing wrong to me.

Simply forgiving sinners doesn't make them righteous.

They are still sinners.

Just sinners whose misdoings are not being held against them.

But in the gospel,

a righteousness of God is revealed.

God actually makes us righteous.

That needs to happen if we are going to spend an eternity with God.

Because God is a holy God

and he can't just forgive and move on.

He actually needs to do justice.

Sin needs to be punished.

Our sin needs more than forgiveness.

It needs to be taken away.

We need to be justified.
We need to be just as if I'd never sinned.

Being justified answers the question
of how a sinful people can live with a holy God.

We are no longer a sinful people.

He has examined the charge and declared us innocent.

But it begs a new question.

How can we be justified?

How can someone like you or I be declared completely innocent?

The answer comes in verse 25.

“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement

through the shedding of his blood to be received through faith.”

The actual meaning of the word translated 'sacrifice of atonement'
is a 'sacrifice that turns away wrath'

“God presented Christ as a sacrifice to turn away his wrath
through the shedding of his blood.”

It's difficult to put the Greek into English.

You don't really want to translate one word with a phrase.

It's one word that means 'sacrifice that turns away wrath'.

There is an English word that fits the Greek word well.

The problem is that it has slipped into disuse,
so modern translators are reluctant to use it.

The word is propitiation.

God presented Jesus as a propitiation
through the shedding of his blood.

That would be the best translation –

it's just that no one knows what propitiation means these days
so we use phrases to talk our way around it.

A propitiation is a sacrifice that turns away someone's anger.

One way to think about it

is to imagine a school kid who is having real problems with a teacher.

They come home from school,

go into their bedroom,

and belt the stuffing out of their long suffering teddy on their bed.

And then they feel much better.
The teddy has propitiated the child.
It has turned aside their anger at the teacher.
Now of course the analogy breaks down at certain points.
The child's anger at the teacher may or may not be for a good reason.
God's anger with us is perfectly just.
But in so far as the analogy works,
Jesus is the teddy.
God pours out his anger at our sin on Jesus.

God had to punish sin because he is a righteous God.
Verse 25 continues,
"He did this to demonstrate his righteousness,
because in his forbearance
he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished."
Forbearance means that God was being patient.
He was giving people space to repent.
The wages of sin is death.
If God had given out the just punishment to us straight away,
then there would have been no opportunity for us to be saved.
But God was patient.
But his patience doesn't mean that he can ignore sin.
He must punish it in the end.
Otherwise there would be no justice.
So God demonstrated his justice by presenting Jesus as a propitiation.
All God's anger at sin was poured out on Jesus.
Sin was punished.
God's justice was maintained.

Now many people raise an objection at this point.
The objection goes something like this.
"Jesus is an innocent third party.
How can you call it justice,
when he gets punished for my sin?
I think that is the height of injustice."

That might be the case if you think about Jesus as just a good man.
But Jesus is God the Son.

So when God punishes Jesus,
he is actually taking our sin upon himself.
There is no innocent third party.

There is just a God who both makes the sacrifice and is the sacrifice.

So here is what God does for us in Jesus in summary.

God justifies us.

More than declaring us forgiven,
he actually finds us innocent.

We are innocent because our guilt is transferred onto Jesus
and he is punished.

We gain access into this free gift of God
only by faith
by putting our trust in Jesus.

As I said before,

there's no need to understand exactly how you are saved to be saved.

But if you understand it,

it can hardly help but give you a reason to praise God for his goodness.

Our salvation is free.

We did nothing to earn it.

Our salvation is costly,

Jesus bore God's wrath in our place.

Having explained what lies at the heart of the gospel,

Paul gives us three consequences.

We don't have time to expand on them much.

1. No boasting. 27-28.

If our salvation is a free gift.

Then there is no possible reason for us to boast.

God's wrath at your sin was turned aside onto Jesus.

There's nothing for you to boast in about that.

Instead of boasting about our own righteousness,

we will praise God for his mercy.
 Now as you go on in the Christian life,
 hopefully you get better at living the sort of life that God desires.
 So it's a great temptation to boast,
 because when you look around,
 You are actually living a better life than those around you.
 But your salvation is not based on your good life.
 It is based on God's gift.
 A gift you didn't earn.
 And even your good life
 is a result of God's Holy Spirit at work in you.
 I know some Christians
 who have achieved remarkable things for God's kingdom.
 There are even greater Christians out there, just I haven't met them.
 And I want to speak about their hearts.
 You can only speak of the hearts of people you know.
 And these are some really special people.
 Guy Mason has planted a network of seven churches.
 Bruce Nixon gave really significant amounts of money
 towards projects to benefit God's kingdom.
 Peter Adam has trained and mentored
 two generations of Christian leaders
 who are serving God around the globe.
 None of these wonderful Christians boasts of their achievements.
 They are or were in Bruce's case,
 he has gone to be with his Lord,
 humble quietly spoken believers.
 They know that they are justified only by faith in Jesus,
 not by anything they have done.
 They don't boast.
 We do not boast.

2. It's a level playing field. 29.
 If salvation comes by trusting in Jesus.
 Anyone can do that.

No one group of people are special in God's sight.
 And so our church practices must reflect God's even handedness.
 In multicultural Australia,
 there's no place for a church of England.
 We need to have a church of God
 for people from every nation on earth.
 If we are to have an Anglican church,
 we must be intentional
 about being accessible to people from all over the place.
 It might not seem like a big issue in Anglo Saxon Hastings.
 But even in Hastings we have very different cultures in our town.
 The people who are linked to the navy are a different culture
 from the people who are in public housing.
 The people on properties just out of town are a different culture
 from the people who live in the retirement villages.
 God is even handed.
 We must be too.
 That means we need to be a church
 for all of the types of people who live around here.
 That may mean over time having more opportunities to gather.
 We may need a youth service in the evening.
 We may need a special gathering for the folk at Trinity Tucker.
 God is the God of everyone.
 That puts an obligation on us.

3. What happens to the law,
 if salvation is by faith? 31.
 We will seek to please God out of gratitude for his free gift.
 Not as a way to try to earn salvation,
 but as a response of thankfulness.
 If we aren't earning our salvation,
 it would be easy to come to the conclusion
 that our lives don't matter.
 But they do.
 If God has declared that you are righteous.

He's looked at the list of accusations against you,
and pronounced that you are not guilty
on the basis of what Jesus has done for you,
then you are going to want to live the way you are.

26 years ago,

Cherida saved me from the degeneracy of bachelordom.

I now know about cleaning toilets and changing sheets on the bed.

Would I want to return to the grotty single man I was?

Nah.

Just because we have been justified, redeemed and saved
without effort or work by us,

doesn't mean we want to return to the things
we've been saved from.

Far from it.

Let's live with glad hearts for God.

Let's take a moment to praise God
that we are justified freely by his grace.